

US to run for a seat on UN Human Rights Council

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Washington— In a deviation from policies of the Bush Administration, the United States has decided to run for a seat on the UN Human Rights Council with the goal of making it a more effective body to promote and protect human rights.

"The decision is in keeping with the Obama Administration's 'new era of engagement' with other nations to advance American security interests and meet the global challenges of the 21st century," the State Department said in a statement on Tuesday.

Created in March 2006, the UNHRC is an inter-governmental body made up of 47 elected members whose mission is to strengthen the promotion and protection of human rights globally. The next round of elections are scheduled for May 15. The Bush administration has shunned the organisation.

Terming Human Rights an essential element of the US Foreign Policy, the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, said: "With others, we will engage in the work of improving the UN human rights system to advance the vision of the UN Declaration on Human Rights."

The US Ambassador to the UN, Susan Rice, said the US was seeking election to the Council because it believes that it can make the council a more effective forum to promote and protect human rights by working from within.

"We hope to work in partnership with many countries to achieve a more effective Council," she said.

The US decision was immediately welcomed by a host of countries.

"France warmly welcomes the decision of the new US administration to be involved in the Human Rights Council," said Jean Maurice Ripert, the French Ambassador to the UN.

"The United Nations needs the United States, in particular to promote human rights and democracy throughout the world," he said.

Welcoming the decision, Howard L Berman, Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, said "this global forum has become increasingly dysfunctional and politicized, with virtually no guidance from the United States."

"For too long the United States has sat on the sidelines. In fact, during the past several years the Council's pathological focus on demonizing Israel has intensified to the point that genuine human rights crises in Zimbabwe, Sudan and other countries have essentially escaped scrutiny."

"The time is ripe to take a more positive and active role in challenging the Council and in speaking out about genuine human rights atrocities," he said in a statement.